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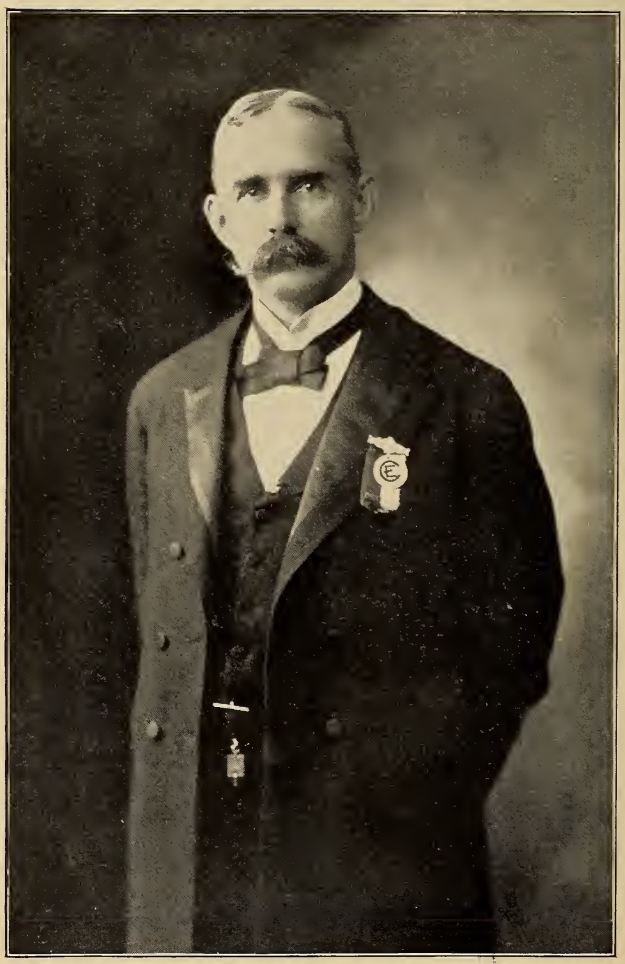

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Old Lanterns for Present Paths

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By Way of Introduction.

THE messages for young lives which compose this little volume are found in the book of Jeremiah. They spoke strongly to my own heart during a long and lonely voyage on a tropic sea, and I wrote them down more for my own instruction and inspiration than with the thought of publishing them for others. But whatever reaches one heart is apt to reach another. Whatever helps one life is pretty sure to help another.

Hoping that this little book may not prove to be an exception to this nearly universal rule, I send it on its way. May it speak some word of counsel to many a modest youth who like Jeremiah shall grow into intrepid manhood. May it tell the secret of national disaster and national prosperity to many a young patriot. May it lead its readers to turn their faces to God, to blush only for sin, to choose the right way however unpopular, and to emulate the example of the bold, uncompromising, yet tender-hearted prophet, whose message the young men and women of to-day peculiarly need to heed.

F. E. C.

Old Lanterns for Present Paths.

I.

AN OLD PROPHET'S MESSAGE TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

LIGHT from the past often illumines present pathways. As the light from a distant star, light which has taken ten thousand years to reach this world, is just as illumining according to its power as the light of the electric globe which the most recent invention has given us, so wisdom from the sages of the past is quite as trustworthy as the late light of scientific truth. The latter may seem more brilliant, because it is nearer to us; but light is light, and truth is truth, and it is the part of wisdom to receive it and open our hearts to it, from whatever source it streams.

A pithy prophet of old, altogether too little studied in these self-confident days, throws much light on present paths; and I shall be

glad if this little volume opens the windows of any heart to the divine radiance of ancient truth.

The old prophet, Jeremiah, the light of whose lantern I wish, if possible, to cast upon the pathway of the young, seems, before all others, the young people's prophet. He was himself a very young man when he began to prophesy. "I am but a child," he says of himself.

He was timid, shrinking, bashful by nature, but bold, uncompromising, utterly fearless by grace. He was an ardent reformer, a good citizen, a mighty advocate of righteousness. He lived in troublous and eventful times. He suffered imprisonment in a foul and miry dungeon for righteousness' sake. He stood before kings and was the counsellor of monarchs. He dared to take the unpopular side.

Moreover, he was not only a man of commanding personality, a prophet of supernatural gifts; he was an author of marked individuality. He coined pithy phrases which are current to-day. He was a master of a terse, epigrammatic style. The mere student of literature is surprised to find that many of the familiar sayings that have worn well for twenty-five hundred years can be traced to Jeremiah. Witness a few such sayings:

"Peace, peace, when there is no peace." "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"

And yet this prophet of the gentle nature, but of the bold character, this forerunner and type of the Christian citizen, this brilliant poet, this racy writer, has been more neglected than almost any other Scripture writer.

This has largely come about, I believe, because Jeremiah has come to be considered only as a lugubrious, doleful foreboder of evil. From his very name a word has been coined which, as commonly used, denotes a rasping and querulous complaint of the existing order. A "jeremiad" is an unpleasant and often groundless denunciation of things as they are.

The word does Jeremiah much injustice; for this modest, brave, unassuming, intrepid soul spoke only as he was compelled by a high sense of duty, by the unutterable corruption of the people, and by the warning voice of the Spirit of God.

His career and his words are well worth the study and imitation of the young people of the present day who would be not only good men and women, but good citizens and eminent

Christians. Let us consider his modest youth and intrepid manhood a little more at length.

The Modest Youth.

The very first thing that we know about Jeremiah predisposes us in his favor. He was a modest youth. He shrank from publicity. He distrusted his own powers.

When the word of the Lord came to him, conveying the tremendous news that he had been "ordained a prophet unto the nations," Jeremiah cried out in dismay, "Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak; for I am a child."

Most great and strong characters whom God signally uses are at their base modest, shrinking, sensitive. Perhaps we should find that all men who have been most useful were at first self-distrustful, could we but know their early struggles. Surely it was so with Moses, David, Elijah, John the Baptist. The early days of many a modern hero—Cromwell, Washington, Grant—reveal the same characteristic.

God seems to have little use for the braggart. Time and circumstance soon prick the bubble of self-conceit. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." All history is a comment on the truth of this proverb.

Jeremiah possessed the first requisite of real

greatness. He was modest and humble. He did not think of himself more highly than he ought to think. He was the very one whom God could "set over the nations." He could be made "a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land."

O young man, young woman, you who have used your shrinking, modest disposition as an excuse for not doing special and earnest service; you who have stuffed your ears with the wax of bashfulness when God has spoken; you who have said with Moses, "Send by whom thou wilt send, by any one but me," know you that this very disposition which you have urged as your excuse is your qualification.

If yours is a genuine, and not a false, hypocritical, modesty, it is the foundation mortar in which may be embedded the "iron pillar" and "brazen wall" of the "defenced city." Do not longer envy your companion his assurance and confidence and unblushing *sang froid.* It is more likely that God has given to you the stirring message, the important life-work, than to him. If necessary, the Lord can put forth his hand and touch thy mouth as he did Jeremiah's, and say unto thee, "Behold I have put my word in thy mouth."

Use not thy bashful modesty as a stone of stumbling; use it as a stepping-stone to a large

and noble life. Speak the stumbling, hesitating word that God gives thee to speak. It is his word. Do the unaccustomed act from which thou dost shrink, though thou dost it with awkward and bungling fingers, if it is for his sake.

The modest man that yet dares to speak for God and do the right has always been God's chosen man.

The Intrepid Man.

The shrinking child develops into the intrepid man. His life was passed amid stress and storm. He was *the* unpopular man of his time. He was always foreboding evil. Cassandra-like, he was seldom believed. His predictions were not immediately fulfilled, and between the date of the prophecy and its fulfilment people had time to jeer and scoff and berate the seer.

Jeremiah's own neighbors and kindred hated him. In the little village of Anathoth, three miles north of Jerusalem, where he was born and where his early life was spent, he discovered a plot against his life which was barely frustrated. But this did not turn him from his mission or silence his message.

He lived under at least four kings whose hopes and wishes were thwarted by his proph-

ecies. But he was never muzzled. False prophets on every side predicted prosperity, and uttered smooth sayings which pleased the princes and nobles; and Jeremiah saw the way to royal favor and worldly happiness made very plain; but he never spake with lying lips the message which God gave him not.

Patriotism seemed to demand that with the clamorous false prophets he should incite the people to an alliance with Egypt rather than advise them, as he constantly did, to submit to the yoke of Babylon. But for the latter course he had the "thus saith the Lord," and not for the former; and he never hesitated as to his message.

Perhaps the period most trying to his faith and courage occurred during the reign of Zedekiah, a well-meaning, but weak and vacillating, prince, whom Nebuchadnezzar had placed upon the throne, causing him at the same time to take an oath of allegiance to Babylon in the name of Jehovah.

In an evil day, however, Zedekiah listened to false counsellors, repudiated his allegiance to Babylon, and sought alliance with Egypt. Jerusalem was besieged. The armies of Egypt came to her defence. At first it seemed that the allied forces would conquer. The armies

of Nebuchadnezzar withdrew for a little, and the siege was raised. Then in the midst of the general rejoicing Jeremiah was denounced as a croaker, a false prophet, a traitor to his country. "Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans," they said. By a personal enemy he was apprehended, beaten, bastinadoed, and thrust into a noisome dungeon.

But the king, Zedekiah, was more tender-hearted, and brought him out of his miry prison-house, and asked anxiously, "Is there any word from the Lord?"

Here, from a worldly point of view, was Jeremiah's chance. A single "smooth" prophecy, and all would have been well. Many a bold man, whose spirit has been broken by the scourge and the prison-house has recanted under similar circumstances. Not so Jeremiah.

"Is there any word from the Lord?"

"There is," answered the uncompromising prophet. "Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."

O brave, strong, modest, undaunted spirit! may we learn thy secret of uncompromising, unswerving allegiance to the Lord of hosts. May we dare to be Jeremiahs. May we dare to stand alone against a hostile world, if need be, the Lord our only fortress and high tower.

II.

THE SECRET OF NATIONAL DISASTER.

THE burden of Jeremiah's long wail of woe is the sin of the people of Israel, which brought disaster and destruction in its train. There are fifty-two chapters in the book that bears his name, and the burden of almost every one is summed up in the twenty-fifth verse of the fifth chapter: "Your iniquities have turned away these things [prosperity and abundant harvests], and your sins have withholden good from you."

It is the old, old message, that needs ever to be reiterated. Noah, Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and in later days Luther, Savonarola, Wilberforce, Parkhurst, have taken up the same message, and in many tongues, in many lands, have summoned the people to awake to righteousness.

Thank God for the host of young reformers, unknown to fame and the newspapers, but not unknown to God, whom the recent good-citizenship movement has aroused from leth-

argy, and whose burning desire it is to make America a people whose God is the Lord. All these will find in Jeremiah and his book studies of supreme interest.

Here, then, is Jeremiah's message condensed into a sentence: "Your sins have withholden good from you."

All history is but a commentary on this verse. A nation is not permanently prosperous because of the vast extent of her fertile acres, because of her genial climate or inexhaustible resources. If this were so, sturdy, mountainous Switzerland, ice-clad Norway, fog-enveloped England, rock-bound, sterile Massachusetts, would have but a small place in the family of states.

There is another element that enters in to make a nation strong or weak, powerful or puny. We may say it is the only element, because it is *God.* There is a God of nations, and upon every page of history since time began is stamped this legend: "Your sins have withholden good from you."

Jeremiah's prophecy is one of the greatest of treatises on good citizenship, because in every line it recognizes this tremendous truth. Read it through with this for the key-thought, and its treasures are unlocked. O youthful citizen, it is no less true to-day than in the

days of the prophet of Anathoth. There is but one ultimate source of national disaster, and that is national sin. When combating the evils engendered by national greed and pride and debauchery and oppression, you are fighting for your nation's life.

God is *not* upon the side of the strongest battalions. All history brands as a lie this monstrous piece of cynicism. God is on the side of righteousness and justice and purity.

The bacillus of every national disease that ever decimated a people is the same. The source of every national disaster can always be spelled with three letters,—s-i-n. "Your sins have withholden good from you."

III.

THE SECRET OF NATIONAL PROSPERITY.

IF the one source of national disaster is turning away from God to sin, it is very evident that the one secret of recovered national prosperity is turning back to God from sin. So we should be surprised if we did not find in Jeremiah this keynote, recurring in almost every chapter: "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel." (Jer. iii. 23.)

This is one of the truths that has become a truism, but it is a truism which in every generation needs to be recovered from the obscurity of familiarity. A man recently told me that he had lived all his life in London, but had never seen the Tower. There are many people in Buffalo who have never seen Niagara Falls, and tens of thousands in Boston who have never climbed Bunker Hill Monument. So there are millions of intelligent

people in the world who have lived all their lives with this towering fact staring them in the face from every page of history, but have never seen it. There are multitudes in whose ears has been sounding as with cataract roar this tremendous truth spoken by the voice of God himself: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people;" and yet they have never heard it.

Who, when he stops to look and listen, can doubt that Jeremiah is right? Who can doubt that if to-morrow the United States of America, or Great Britain, with all her colonies, should become in very truth a God-fearing nation, a Christian nation in every act as well as in name, it would enter upon such a career of dazzling prosperity as the world has never seen?

The billions of dollars spent for strong drink would be received and consecrated to noble uses; the millions of lives worse than wasted in debauchery and sin would be redeemed, and would contribute to the building up and not the pulling down of the state; and the energies of the nation now running to waste like the foul waters of an open sewer, polluting the very atmosphere, would be conserved and used every hour in turning the mill-wheels of national prosperity; and thus

would be made a history more splendid and brilliant than human pen has ever narrated.

Then know, O young men, from this glorious vision of a possible nationality that you are serving your country best when you are serving God best.

You are not acting the part of a true patriot only when you are attending the primaries, or depositing your ballots at the polls for a righteous candidate, or speaking on the hustings for national honor. You are performing a patriot's duty when teaching a Sunday class of poor children, when leading a Christian Endeavor meeting, when giving your time and energy to an obscure lookout committee or prayer-meeting committee, when leading one soul to Christ, when in any way you are turning the feet of the people back to God. That is good citizenship. That is true loyalty. That is doing your little best to make your beloved land truly prosperous.

IV.

TURNING THE FACE TO GOD.

THE book of Jeremiah is famous for its graphic, pungent phrases, phrases that live and breathe. Here is one of them. Jehovah, speaking through his prophet of rebellious and idolatrous Israel, says, "They have turned their back unto me, and not their face."

We turn our back on God when we forget him, going about our own ways, seeking our own ends, thinking our own thoughts. God is not in any of our thoughts. We do nothing with reference to his glory. We order our lives solely with reference to gain and pleasure. Then we turn our back on God. We turn our back to God when we deliberately sin. No man can commit sin looking steadfastly into God's face. We instinctively feel that his eyes are too pure to behold iniquity. As the child will not go to the forbidden cupboard to steal the sweets when his mother is in the room, so God's child will

never eat of the forbidden fruit looking in his Father's face.

Futile as man's attempts may be to get away from the all-seeing Eye, he will always turn his back to God before he commits deliberate sin.

The results of sin, as well, cause us to turn the back to God. As a result of sin we are ashamed to look God in the face. Of the Israelites of old the Lord said through Jeremiah: "As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed, . . . saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face." (Jer. ii. 26, 27.) So our faces, once turned away by sin, remain averted from shame; and we sulk and hang our heads, perhaps, in bitterness and despair.

Fortunately the very figure of speech which indicates departure from God, with all its attendant woe and shame, suggests, by way of contrast, the return to God. To sin is to turn the back; to repent is to turn the face to God. So simple and yet so radical is the great truth of salvation. It can be accomplished in a moment, but it involves a complete turning about. Almost in the twinkling of an eye can the face be turned, but it must be *turned*. There is no

salvation while the face is averted by sin, while the eye is downcast by despair, while the countenance is hidden in sulky shame. Many definitions of what it is to become a Christian have been given: this is one of the best: "Turning the face to God." There is life in a look.

Young man, young woman, you long to know your relationship to God. Here is a test. Can you look God in the face? Can you write down your deeds and words and secret thoughts, and, looking up into the face of your Father, say, "Here is my life, O God; let thy blessing rest upon it"? Or, when you think of your life, or some portions of it, do you avert your face from the all-seeing One?

Do not think it is a timid, scared life you would live with God's eye ever consciously upon you. The child playing on the nursery floor is not abashed or made uneasy by its mother's presence, but in every new game and fresh childish joy looks up into her eye for the answering smile it is sure to find. The joy is not complete unless the mother sees and shares it. So the Christian's chief joy and satisfaction is that God sees him, and that he can see God in all the trivial round, the common task of life.

There is another side to this. God turns

his back to those who persistently turn their backs to him. "I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity," says Jehovah through Jeremiah. Oh, terrible calamity! Oh, awful curse! Oh, sad condensation of all the woes of this woful prophecy! But upon us this curse need never fall; for, if we turn the face to God, even though we are in the far country, we shall see him coming out to meet us with the robe and the ring, and turning upon us his reconciled face.

V.

PEACE THAT IS NO PEACE.

ONE of the greatest temptations of Jeremiah's life must have been to cry, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. It is always easier for sensitive souls to speak smooth words than rough; and Jeremiah was essentially a gentle, sensitive man. It is never pleasant to be regarded as a Cassandra. Considerations of patriotism seemed to demand that he should hearten the people rather than discourage them. King and prince and people alike asked for words of cheer and hope rather than of woe and denunciation; but Jeremiah would not heal slightly the hurt of the daughter of his people; he would not cry, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace.

The individual is the nation in miniature; and there is false peace which we, like the Israelites, seek to cherish, against which some intrepid Jeremiah should warn.

There is a peace of false doctrine. The philosophies of atheism, materialism, utilitarian-

ism, all bring a certain satisfaction to their votaries. In a measure their speculations satisfy the craving of the insatiable mind. Even the absurdities and hopelessness of pessimism, which finds the universe an absolute tangle, life a huge mistake, the world a dreary waste of suffering and woe, governed by the great malevolent UNCONSCIOUS, furnishes a kind of satisfaction to Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and their followers. But who can doubt that it is a peace which is no peace?

There is a peace produced by indifference to truth. The call to repentance, once resisted, when repeated, sounds ever fainter and fainter. There are men who can sit unmoved under the most searching gospel appeals. Why? Because of the peace born of familiarity and indifference. These same truths, presented in the same way, in boyhood aroused those same men to an agony of concern. But the concern was quieted; the grieved spirit ceased to strive, and the opiate of indifference, frequently administered, has produced a peace which is no peace.

There is a peace produced by sin. The sinful deed that when first indulged terrifies and horrifies us, when oft repeated, loses all its horror. At first it seems as if the very pit of perdition were yawning at our feet; but

each repetition of the act fills up the pit and plants a grove of sensuous delights in its place.

It is the old, old story. We first endure, then pity, then embrace. The leprosy of sin eats into the vitals little by little, until the living, sensitive flesh becomes as dead and insensitive as the wood of a graven image. This is an awful peace, that is no peace,—the peace of corruption and death.

But there is a peace that is peace, the peace of which our Lord speaks with reiterated emphasis, the peace which he left, the peace which the world cannot give, which the world cannot take away. This is the peace which the prisoner for righteousness' sake has known in the dungeon, which the mother has known at the coffin of her firstborn, which the martyr has known on the rack and at the stake.

Is this peace abiding?

The saints of all the ages answer, Yes.

Does it endure the stress and strain of care and sorrow and suffering?

Martyrs, prophets, priest, confessors, answer Yes.

Is it for you and me?

Ten million humble souls in all the ages, their faces transfigured with its radiance, answer, Yes.

VI.

PEOPLE THAT CANNOT BLUSH.

THE blush that reddens the cheek may be a sign of conscious sin. The pallid, unblushing cheek may be a sign of greater sin. Shame hangs out its red flag for misdeed or mistake. Shamelessness strikes its colors, and shows no sign of distress.

It is a sad thing when a man cannot blush. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination?" said Jehovah speaking through Jeremiah. "Nay, they were not at all ashamed, *neither could they blush;* therefore shall they fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the Lord."

Shameful shamelessness brings this dreadful reward: "I will surely consume them, saith the Lord; there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig-tree; and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them."

Is this too hard a sentence, too dire a fate?

We cannot think so when we realize what inability to blush for sin involves.

Unblushing sin means persistent sin. The first time, the tenth time, the one hundredth time, the soul blushes for itself in secret; and, if discovered, the red cheek shows the red shame beneath. But the thousandth time the sin has become so familiar and customary a thing that it excites no uneasy surprise, and the telltale cheek records no emotion. It cannot blush.

Unblushing sin means sin unrepented of. Sin repented of and forgiven, even unto seventy times seven, does not wholly indurate the heart. True repentance and confession keep the soul fresh and sensitive and sweet. Unblushing sin no longer wishes to repent or sees the necessity of repentance, and at last the soul no more feels contrition than a marble statue can display remorse.

Unblushing sin is hopeless sin. Not because the sin itself may be worse than other sins, but because, from the very nature of it, sorrow, repentance, forgiveness, restoration, cannot follow. The Magdalen could be forgiven; the harlot could be counted among the worthies of faith; David could be restored to divine favor, because, when he heard Nathan's "Thou art the man," he could blush, and

cry out in anguish, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." But for the unblushing sinner there is no hope. This is the unpardonable sin. This is the sin that grieves and drives away the Spirit of God. This is the sin that renders the heart insensitive, callous, unblushing, so that repentance and faith are as impossible as pain is to a leper's dead and bloodless finger-tips.

O God, keep us from the dreadful fate of the man who cannot blush.

VII.

BECAUSE—THEREFORE.

WOULD that we could always see the "THEREFORE" follow the "BECAUSE" in actual life as plainly as we can see them upon the printed page. "And the Lord saith," wrote Jeremiah, "BECAUSE they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein . . . THEREFORE, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink."

The "*because*" is always followed by the "*therefore*." Not at once, perhaps. In this chapter of Jeremiah after the "*because*" we have to look through two brief verses before we find the "*therefore*." Thirty-six words intervene, but the "*therefore*" follows none the less surely. Sentence against an evil work is not always speedily fulfilled, but it is always fulfilled. The wormwood always follows the for-

saking; the water of gall the disobedience. Search history through, and tell me whether you can find a single instance in nation or family where godlessness, debauchery, and disobedience of the laws of God brought permanent peace and prosperity. Unhesitatingly I dare to challenge the strictest, most careful research where the history of nation or family can be seen as a whole.

To be sure, we sometimes see a little segment of a disobedient life, and think it prosperous. We fret ourselves because of the prosperity of the wicked. But, when we understand "their end," we see, as did the Psalmist, how foolish and unreasonable was our fretting. The seeming prosperity is only the interlude between the "*because*" and the "*therefore.*" When we see enough of the arc of a man's life or a nation's life, we always see that there is a "*therefore*" as well as the "*because.*"

"*Because*" not only always is, but always must be, followed by "*therefore.*" It is not a matter of coincidence; it is a matter of necessity. It is not an abstraction of theology. It is a matter of science, of physics, of law. If the effect does not follow the cause, God is not God. The throne of the universe is abdicated if "*because*" has no "*therefore.*"

These truths are so trite and threadbare that

one feels like apologizing for their restatement. Ah! but their application to every individual life can never become a worn-out, useless task. Every man must realize the inevitable coming "*therefore*" in his own life, if he would not make shipwreck of it. It is the lack of this that has brought to many a fair young life recklessness, misery, perdition.

But there is a brighter side. Thank God, there is many another and many a blessed "*because*" and "*therefore.*" *Because* repentance, *therefore* life. *Because* faith, *therefore* salvation. *Because* trust, *therefore* peace. *Because* self-surrender, *therefore* fulness of joy. And these causes and these effects, thank God again, are just as inevitable and just as necessary as those which Jeremiah records.

VIII.

THE ETHIOPIAN'S SKIN.

MANY of Jeremiah's pithy sayings have passed into current proverbs; and all literature does tribute to him, though often unconsciously. None of his trenchant phrases have been caught up by more lips or printed upon more pages than this: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"

Often as this familiar phrase is used, its true significance is seldom realized. It relates, as Jeremiah used it, to the persistence of character. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are *accustomed* [or taught] to do evil." The last part of the verse, though seldom quoted, is quite as important as the first part.

There are two answers to the question, diametrically opposed to each other, but equally true: No, Yes. Can an Ethiopian change his skin? No. Character tends to fix itself. The

evil stain becomes ever more indelible. The bad thought, repeated and repeated and repeated over again, becomes at last a part of the texture of the soul. It is woven into the life as the black figure is worn into the carpet. It seems as impossible to get it out of the soul as to get the constantly recurring figure out of the carpet without destroying it. The evil deed, repeated until it becomes habitual, becomes no mere act, accomplished and done with; it becomes a part of the man as truly as the black skin is a part of the Ethiopian or the spots are characteristic of the leopard.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Alas! alas! no. It becomes only blacker and blacker. But ask the question once more from the standpoint of the gospel of grace. Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Yes, yes, ten million blood-washed Ethiopians answer, Yes. This is the "miracle of grace." Salvation consists not in emotion, in hallelujahs, in raptures, in the acceptance of a body of doctrine. It is the whitening of the Ethiopian's skin, the changing of the leopard's inborn spots. It is the learning to do good of those who are accustomed to do evil.

Will cannot do this. Vows, pledges, a mother's tears, a wife's heart-broken entreaty, none can change the spots; but in a multitude

of cases the Holy Spirit has wrought this wondrous change, and the blackened soul has become whiter than snow.

All history is full of these transformations. Our own limited observation and experience have furnished added examples. It is of no use to dispute the sun in the heavens, or that the stars shine at night. There they are; look at them. How is the change wrought? By the complete surrender to God of the whole being, black skin, leopard spots, bad habits, hardened ways, perverse views, everything, with the sincere prayer that he would henceforth take and change and cleanse and keep.

By God's grace the Ethiopian can change his skin, the leopard can change his spots.

IX.

THE TWO WAYS.

JEREMIAH is noted for his directness and clear-cut simplicity. He never confuses issues. There is a right and a wrong. There is life and death. There is obedience and prosperity, and disobedience and destruction. The whole message of his more than forty years of prophesying is condensed into the eighth verse of the twenty-first chapter: "Thus saith the Lord: Behold I set before you the way of life, and the way of death."

In this particular instance the way of death meant remaining in the besieged city of Jerusalem; the way of life meant going out to the Chaldeans, in accordance with the command of God.

But, whatever the circumstances, whatever the century, there are always two ways, and only two ways, open to the feet of man: one, the way of life; the other, the way of death.

To be sure, one often seems to come to the

crossroads where four ways meet, or to a whole network of converging streets; but careful scrutiny will resolve the seeming jumble of highways into two. All on one side converge into the right-hand road, all on the other into the left-hand, after running a little way, just as some paths go over the hill and some around, but all come together on the other side.

This thought greatly simplifies the problems of life. There is always God's way and the devil's way. Becoming a Christian is but choosing God's way. Blindly, gropingly, stumblingly we may enter upon this way at first; frequent by-paths into flower-covered swamps, where our feet sink into the mire of sin, may tempt us from the king's highroad; but little by little, if our purpose is to walk in God's road, we find it growing more fully defined, more attractive, more easy to the feet.

There is also Satan's way, and he who chooses it finds, whatever its twistings and turnings, however it seems sometimes to double upon itself, that it leads inevitably and always in one direction.

The Way of Life! The Way of Death! Do not think that these are phrases of the Bible alone. Human experience is full of them. The right is the way of life. Ask the saint;

ask the martyr who followed this way until it led him into the flames or the wild beasts' den; ask the commonplace, every-day Christian who has actually walked with God; and without a single exception they will all tell you this is the way of *life*, joyous, full, ecstatic life, life more abundant. The wrong is always the way of death. Ask the drunkard; ask the diseased libertine; ask the miser; ask the selfish sensualist; and their wizened, shrunken, atrophied characters, if not their words, will tell you that this road leads to death.

But what are right and wrong, the roads that lead to life or death?

The same now as in Jeremiah's day. Right is obedience to God, and obedience is life. Wrong is disobedience to God, and disobedience is death.

X.

THE UNPOPULAR SIDE.

JEREMIAH was on the unpopular side all his life. It was not his fault, but his misfortune. With his shrinking, sensitive soul it must have been genuine torture to him to be in constant opposition to all the leading men of his time.

Nor was it especially to his credit that he was on the unpopular side. It was to his credit that he dared to be on the right side; but the right side is sometimes, nay, often, I am glad to believe, the popular side; and the reformer has the grateful task of leading on to victory amid the plaudits of the people.

Not so with Jeremiah. He was always in opposition to the people, because the people of his day were always in opposition to God. He was always prophesying evil, because there was no good to predict concerning their disobedient ways.

Most trying of all the experiences in his life must have been the time when he was com-

pelled to tell the people that it was God's will that they should submit to the Chaldean invader, to show the white flag of truce to the despoiler of their city, and unresistingly to go into captivity to Babylon. How pusillanimous and cowardly he must have seemed!

How unfortunately he contrasted with the other high-stepping, spirited prophets, who counselled resistance to Babylon, and alliance with Egypt, and fighting for their liberties to the bitter end! They must have posed as the reformers, the statesmen, the noble-minded patriots. He was the traitor, the coward, the white-livered poltroon.

The reform shibboleth is not always the watchword of obedience to God. The cheapest kind of popularity can sometimes be won under the banner of reform.

In these days especially we need not only to try the spirits, but to try the reforms. Many a popular fad may be picked up to furnish a rallying-cry. It requires no courage and few brains to sound it. To be a fanatic is not necessarily the sign of courage or divine wisdom. To ramp and rave, and denounce the times, and pour out bitter invective against the real or supposed evils of the day, is not a sure sign of the true prophet.

To most Jews just before the Babylonian

captivity the false prophets who counselled resistance to Babylon to the bloody end must have seemed the real reformers. Jeremiah must have seemed the slow conservative, with his talk about giving up the city to Nebuchadnezzar's army. The question is not what is popular, but what is right. To be deemed a coward may require the sublimest courage. There is but one real test of courage or cowardice, of wisdom or folly; there is but one test of the true reformer. Is he obedient to God's will? Is his reform God's reform? Jeremiah always stood this test.

XI.

SOUR GRAPES.

JEREMIAH'S great life-work was to bring home to the people of Israel a sense of their personal accountability. "Because of *your* sin utter destruction shall come upon *you*." "Because you have turned your back to God, God hath turned his back to you," was his constant message reiterated under many forms.

It is, then, very like him to deny the truth of the familiar old proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." "No, no," he says; "this is not so; but every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge."

This is a good message for the modern young man or woman to ponder.

We hear much in these days about environment and heredity, and we sometimes come to regard ourselves with a kind of complacent pity as the victim of circumstances over which

we have no control. The evils and sorrows from which we are suffering, and the sins to which we are prone, we lay to the sour grapes which our fathers have eaten.

Away with all such silly self-pity! For our own iniquity we suffer and die. With our own hands we have plucked the sour grapes; with our own lips we have pressed the juice that has set our teeth on edge.

We have made a failure in life? Why? Not because our father was poor and illiterate, and gave us small advantages of education and a home without books or literary culture. Many a man has overcome all these difficulties and far more serious ones, and has made for himself a good and honored name. Why, then, have not we? Because we have neglected to make use of the opportunities we have, our life is the comparative failure that it is.

We are frequently overcome by some besetting sin, and we lay it to our disposition, the temperament inherited from father or mother, so hasty, so passionate, so prone to untruth! O, let us be honest with ourselves at least while we read this page, with no eye on us but God's. It is our own indulgence in anger and evil thought and deceit that has given our disposition its terrible tyranny.

L. of C.

Or we mourn our indifference and coldness, our backsliding and lack of religious vigor and vitality; and in languid self-pity we lay it to our worldly surroundings, our absorbing business, our peculiar environment. And again we deceive ourselves, or try to deceive ourselves, for in our heart of hearts we know that it is our own self-indulgent souls alone that are responsible for our estrangement from God and for our lack of joy and vigor in his service.

This lesson lies at the beginning of all lessons. It is the first in the primer of the deeper Christian life. It is the beginning of a return from worldliness. It is the precursor of better days; for we see that in our own hearts alone we must begin the reform, when we fully realize that our teeth are set on edge because we ourselves have eaten the sour grapes of disobedience and departure from God.

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